year 1996 and the period from 1st January to 31st March, 1997, distric-wise, is place on the Table of the House. *(See below)*

(b) A number of steps have been taken to simplify and streamline the procedures for expeditious issue of passports which, *inter-alia*, are:

(i) upgradation of office facilities including computerisation leading to faster screening and processing of applications;

(ii) simplification of passport and miscellaneous services forms;

(iii) issue of passports without any further wait for police clearance in cases where police reports are not received during the prescribed time-limit of four weeks;

(iv) a thorough scrutiny of applications at the acceptance stage itself to check their completensess/ correctness in all respects;

(v) augmentation of staff strength to reduce and clear pendencies;

(vi) provision to issue passports in cases of emergency/urgency on out of turn basis on the strength of Verification Certificate issued by an authorised official;

(vii) expansion of the list of officials authorised to sign Verification Certificates;

(viii) introduction of passports valid for 20 years; and

(ix) automatic reissue of passports on expiry without fresh police verification.

(c) No, Sir. There is no proposal at present, to open a Passport Office at Kanyakumari as the opening of new Passport Offices is based on certain parameters such as the location of the existing Passport Offices, inflow of applications from a particular region in the context of the recommendations of the Standing Committee of Parliament for External Affairs that there must be a least 50,000 applications per annum from an area for a new Passport Office to be opened.

Statement

Details of the number of passports issued by the Passport Office in Tamil Nadu, district-wise during the year 1996-97

1. PASSPORT OFFICE CHENNAI

S. No.	Name of District	1996	1997 (upto March, 97)
1.	Coimbatore Rural	2606	625
2.	Coimbatore Urban	5627	2038
3.	Chingleput East	25496	6790
4.	Chingleput West	2767	655
5.	Dharmapuri	1717	415
6.	Madras	48756	11935
7.	North Arcot Ambedkar	7290	1614
8.	Nilgiris	2104	551
9.	Perryar	1955	507
10.	South Arcot Vallalar	14020	3045
11.	Salem	4996	1271
12.	Thiruvannamalai Sambuvarayar	3662	843
13.	Villupuruam Ramassamy Padayachi	8958	2103
14.	Pondicherry & Karaikal	4216	1321

2. PASSPORT OFFICE TIRUCHRAPPALLI

1.	Anna	2649	582
2.	K.D. Chinnamalai	—	220
3.	Kamarajar	4222	931
4.	Kanyakumari	16443	3263
5.	Madurai City	6233	1500
6.	Madurai Rural	6201	1408
7.	Nagai Qutade Millath	23741	4545
8.	Pudukkothai	17966	4663
9.	P.M. Ramalingam	18329	3895
10.	Ramnad	15652	2739
11.	Tanjore West	22152	4548
12.	Tirunelveli	10994	2304
13.	Tiruchirappalli	29951	4304
142.	Thiruvalluvar	—	1720
15.	V.O. Chidambaranar	6826	1629

Indians Arrested by Thai Naval Forces

4279. SHRI W. ANGOU SINGH:
SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the Thai Naval Forces have arrested four Indian nationals and six Myanmar nationals in the Indian territorial waters near Andaman and Nicobar sea and handed them over to the police in Ranong province of South Thailand; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government to get them released?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) Yes, Sir. The nationality of the arrested persons is being ascertained; and

(b) The Government are actively pursuing the matter with the Government of Thailand and the arrested persons are still in Ranong jail. Investigations by the Thai authorities are still underway.

Discrimination against Indians in Recruitment in Gulf Countries

4280. SHRI M.A. BABY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the stringent restrictions and regulations introduced by some Gulf countries in recruiting people of Indian origin for employment in their respective countries; if so, the details thereof; and

(b) the steps being taken or contemplated, to negotiate with those countries the matter of avoidance of discrimination in the recruitment on the basis of religion?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) and (b) Government of India is not aware of any stringent restrictions and regulations introduced by any of the gulf countries directed at recruiting people of Indian origin for employment in their respective countries. Indian citizens constitute largest expetriate groups in most of the gulf countries.

Whenever specific instances of discrimination in the recruitment on the basis of religion in recruiting Indian nationals, are brought to the attention of the government, the matter is taken up with respective governments with a view to bring such practices to an end.

Arms for Insurgents in North-East From Thailand

4281. SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the militant groups in North-East India are getting arms supplies from Thailand;

(b) whether Government have taken up the issue with the Thai Government; and

(c) if so, the Thai response in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) to (c) The Government are aware of the misuse of the territory of Thailand by some insurgent groups operating in the North-East of India. The Government of Thailand have been duly sensitised to our concerns and have been requested to prevent the various insurgent groups from procuring weapons from Thailand. The Government of Thailand have conveyed that they fully share our concerns, and have assured us of their full cooperation in assisting in curbing and containing the activities of undersirable elements on their territory.

Indo-Russian Defence Cooperation

4282. DR. MOHAN BABU:
SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Russia has invited India to plan defence cooperation between the two countries beyond the year 2000;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and